MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

FRED M. LATHAM

INTERVIEW 1026

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Fred M. Latham at his home at 309 Johnson Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1026. The date is December 15, 1992.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, the tape is on now, and I just want to tell you I'm happy to be here talking to you this morning and I appreciate you letting me come. You're one of the most valuable members of the Memories of New Bern Committee and it's nice to talk to you and get you in on these interviews. Just for everybody's benefit, of course, you're the man who takes pictures of everybody we interview and all the old scenes of New Bern, and you've just been a remarkable help to the program. I think from looking at the outline that you've drawn up, that the best way to conduct this particular interview is just to tell you to go ahead and start talking. I may ask a few questions, but, basically, you just tell me your story as you have it here.

Mr. Latham: Okay. My name is Frederick Morey Latham, Sr. I was born 6 February 1924 in New Bern, North Carolina at St. Luke's Hospital. My father was Dr. Joseph Roscoe Latham, Sr. and he was born over in Haslin near Bellhaven. The town no longer exists. It was a post-office many years ago, and it was right at the family plantation or farm. That's where he was born. My mother, she was from Racine, Wisconsin, just about thirty miles below Milwaukee, between Milwaukee and Chicago. Later in World War I, she was a reconstruction aide, which would be described today as a physical therapist type person, helping to get the boys from World War I who were injured or wounded

to learn to walk again and teaching them various things.

Dr. Patterson: You were born what date?

Mr. Latham: I was born on the 6th of February 1924 right at St. Luke's Hospital in New Bern. My parents met down in Ft. Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina when my father was a lieutenant in the Medical Corps down there and my mother was with the nurses and physical therapist type people down there. They were married, 11 October, 1920, up in Racine, Wisconsin. As I traced that, my father first had his practice, he was in a clinic, the Lathrop Clinic in Casper, Wyoming in the early part of 1920. Then he came from the clinic and married his bride there in October of 1920. They stayed out in Casper for approximately six more months. The winter of Wyoming was enough to have him want to come back to eastern North Carolina, and he came back to New Bern in the summer of 1920 and set up practice here. Actually, the first place they stayed in town when they came to town to look around was this house at 309 Johnson Street, and at that time was owned by William Thomas Hudnell who was the husband of Minnie Elizabeth Latham who was my father's first cousin. My mother and my father stayed in this house, and it turns out they actually had the bedroom that I now use. I didn't know this until just a few years ago when I was tracing the house and talked to my mother. I thought it was quite unusual to have that occur, that they had been here first before they lived down on Broad Street across from about where the old bus station was. That house has been removed now. When my sister was born, they moved out to Riverside. This was in 1922. Just before the great fire, they

were out in Riverside. I have found photographs now that have me as a very small baby in front of the old Brock house which was in front of the William Dunn house in Riverside. I've been trying to nail that down exactly when it was, but it was pretty close to my very early life right there in Riverside. I grew up in Riverside. One of the earlier memories I have was about 3 to 4 years old, was when the Bardens moved out there, Graham Barden. Bardie was brought across the street. Bardie being Graham Barden, Jr. He was brought across the street to me and was introduced to me. The first thing he did was to push me down, and so I got up and I pushed him down, and we've been good friends every since. (laughter) That was at the early age of 3 or 4 years. From that point, I was only traveling around the neighborhood then. About four and a half, not quite five, I was experimenting with matches. My father was a smoker, and I got some matches and I went into a little under the stairway closet and I struck a match and I dropped it. I came out and I closed the door. The closet caught on fire. This was, again, a little anecdote that follows with it, how you learn things. The fire department came and they put out the fire. Then my father came. I had run and hid. I hid underneath the house. They finally found me. Then my father decided some discipline to teach me a lesson for that, even at the tender age of four. He took a match out and held my finger for about a second or so and put that match under my finger enough to let me know what a hot flame was. I haven't forgotten that lesson since. Luckily, the fire was put out and all it did was ruin our winter clothes that were in the closet.

There was a bottle of carbon dioxide and a bottle of oxygen in there that daddy used in his practice. The one that decided to go off, luckily, and melt the link in the valve, was the carbon dioxide, which extinguished the fire. If the other one had gone off, we would have had to find a new home because the oxygen would have exploded the entire house with all the smoke and everything. So, that was one of the earlier things I did. Then I started to school in 1930. At that point it was at Riverside, Riverside School, and they had six grades there. Let me see who my first teacher was there, Mrs. Pritchard, and I cannot remember her first name. She was there for years. I believe at that time in the second grade there was Miss Ferebee who was my teacher.

Dr. Patterson: You remember her first name?

Mr. Latham: I cannot remember her first name. It was Miss Pritchard and Miss Ferebee, very formal. Then the Principal during this period was Mrs. Helen Patten. She had been Miss Helen Nicholas prior to her marriage.

Dr. Patterson: Was she Allen Patten's mother.

Mr. Latham: I do not know. But they had a farm out on the Neuse River below New Bern.

Dr. Patterson: That was Allen Patten's mother. It was the Patten Dairy Farm.

Mr. Latham: That's correct.

Dr. Patterson: You know what happened to her?

Mr. Latham: I have no idea.

Dr. Patterson: Her house caught on fire.

Mr. Latham: I remember the house being on fire.

Dr. Patterson: The story as I remember it, she had a piano and went in the house to retrieve some of her music or something and she never got back out again and she was killed in that fire.

Mr. Latham: I see. Well, I did not know that.

Dr. Patterson: Incidentally, Allen Patten just died recently in Graham, North Carolina.

Mr. Latham: Oh, okay. That brings us up to 1992. Then in the fourth grade, was Miss Lila Taylor. She and her family had lived in this house when it was for rent before it was modified. The house was modified in 1907. They lived in this house in about 1900 during a short period of time that the house was rented. Miss Lila taught me my Geography and things of that nature in the fourth grade. Then in the fifth grade, I had Miss Virginia Person, who is now Virginia Person Hollister, Jack Hollister's widow. She's a dear person. Then I had in the sixth grade, I had Mrs. Chadwick. I can't remember now who her husband was, but she lived up until just a few years ago. Her son was Karl Chadwick. During that period I was gradually coming up and learning to move around the neighborhoods a little more. We had the little groups, little cliques I'd guess you'd call us. Some of them today might be called gangs. Each neighborhood had its own little group. Later on I learned that there was quite a little bit of activity around Riverside in that boys visiting in from other parts of town were not necessarily welcome, especially after dark. The night belonged to the Riversidean's, those who lived out there, and they

got the nickname of "Little Russia" for all the little revolutions that were occurring out there. Just about the time that I was ready to come downtown to school, I joined the Boy Scouts.

Dr. Patterson: May I interrupt just a second, Fred, and ask you to look back and name some of the people who were in your particular group out there?

Mr. Latham: Okay. Graham Barden, Jr. and Sam Bledsoe. Sammy's father was a proof reader or one of the editors down at the Sun Journal. Kitty Whitford, he lived a couple of doors down from us. Then down at the end of the corner was "Red" Conderman, that's Robert Conderman. He was killed at Wake Island. He was a naval pilot. Then Leon Scott was down the block and across the street, and D. M. Parker lived next to him. Then we had the Bishop's. Don Bishop and Margaret Bishop were there, and little Johnny at the time. John now lives here in town. I understand he's returned back here to New Bern. I saw him at the New Bern fire presentation at the library in October. Then if I go behind, down the next streets, right beside my home there on National Avenue and C Street, was E. B. Hill. It was considerable name there, I can't remember all. There were two. He was one, and then there was Grey Whitford. That's Milton Grey Whitford who was right behind us. His grandfather was a policeman in the city of New Bern. He'd been adopted by his grandparents after his parents had divorced. Let's see if I can think of some others in the neighborhood there. Behind where the Bardens lived, this would be down on Avenue B, we had Roy Floyd and Gerald Willis. This was right directly across

from Riverside school. Then the Hardison boys, one who was approximately my age was one we called "Hard Rock." Then there was the Owens family. There was Jot Owens who was a good friend of mine. Tom Hunter was in the general neighborhood there. I think he lives in Wilmington now. The Weatherly family was around on North Pasteur Street.

Dr. Patterson: Is that Abbot Weatherly?

Mr. Latham: Abbot Weatherly and his family. It was Irving Weatherly, and then the one that was my age was Marvin Weatherly who still lives in town, or right out side of town. Just beyond that was the Bengels. There was Richard Bengel. We'd call him "Buddy", Buddy Bengel. He just passed away this past couple of months. Just beyond that was Charles Warrington. Charles, I went through school with him and right on up, and he became an engineer at North Carolina State. I'm not sure if he's still living or not. I know he was in poor health there last year when we had our fiftieth anniversary high school reunion.

Dr. Patterson: That's a pretty good description of your earlier neighborhood. When I interrupted you, you were just beginning to get involved in the scouts.

Mr. Latham: The scouts, I joined at twelve years old. That was the minimum age at that time. I joined Troop 13, Mr. B. M. Potter, Bryan Monroe Potter's troop.

Dr. Patterson: Based in Riverside.

Mr. Latham. Based in Riverside, but it was supported by the

Centenary Methodist Church, the men's group down there. They always stayed in the background. At that time you could have asked me who was the one that supported us and I could not have told you. Later years I was well aware of it. The troop met in the Riverside school in the auditorium each Friday evening. And that was a group! Mr. Potter did not pay any attention to the council's request that a troop not have over thirty members. By the time I left there, we had over sixty members. You had to be at that meeting! That was the requirement! If you were not there on time, you may be required to run a gauntlet. I mean a physical gauntlet with belts! As the troop grew and the lines grew longer, you made a definite point of being on time. Whatever was required for discipline, you were properly disciplined or you would be disciplined. They finally got to a point that they would line up from one side of the auditorium to the other. They would go from the two ends of the auditorium at the doors. The individuals who were being chastised or whipped, would have to run from one side to the other while the two lines let them have it with their belts. That became pretty much of a ritual there for anyone who wouldn't behave. But by doing this, that was the best behaved group of boys that I ever ran into. When Mr. Potter said, "Jump!", you just said, "How high?" He had his group organized around the older boys in the troop. I understand the troop started back in the early twenties and he had taken it over in the thirties. I can't remember now who the first scout masters were. I believe now, it's about the longest continual troop in North Carolina, or one of them.

Dr. Patterson: Still in action.

Mr. Latham: It's still in action. Yes, it certainly is. Bardie and I were in the same patrol. Of course when we got our patrol, we named it "Little Russians." Our symbol for our arm patch was a bear. So we went on. The first camporee we went on, they came down to see who these little bolsheviks were down here that would have a name like "Little Russian Patrol." So we got quite a little bit of public relations of perhaps not too good, but they knew we were there. After we came back from camporees, we also went down to Camp Kiro, which is where we had our summer camp.

Dr. Patterson: Where was Camp Kiro?

Mr. Latham: Camp Kiro was located near Riverdale now, it would be as close as I could say, going down between New Bern and Cherry Point, or Havelock. It's over on the river and it's on a high bank. It's part of the National forest I believe now, a little section of it there. During the thirties, the CCC boys, that was one of the camps that they had. They built the little cottages that we used to stay in down there.

Dr. Patterson: So the CCC camp proceeded all of this?

Mr. Latham: Yes.

Dr. Patterson: The buildings were used then by the scouts?

Mr. Latham: By the scouts and others.

Dr. Patterson: That may have been Camp Patterson.

Mr. Latham: It's very possible. It's very possible. They had a mess hall as we would call it. That was where they cooked their

food and the boys went in. I have some old pictures of boys being fed and eating in the mess hall that I got from Jack Gwaltney who was also a member.

Dr. Patterson: Did other scout troop use Camp Kiro?

Mr. Latham: I don't know if other scout troops did. Other groups did. Probably they did, but I don't know of any.

Dr. Patterson: So, this was not a scout camp per se?

Mr. Latham: No. It was for Troop 13 as far as we were concerned. That was our scout camp. They had initiation and it was called the 1K3. That stood for Knights of 13. To get that, to find out what 1K3 meant, what those numbers and the letter was, you had to go through a night of torture more or less. They had a way of making you feel very small when you first went through. They had stations all the way around the camp. They started out with a camp fire and each new rookie or new scout had to go through this. All the older scouts who had been through this, they were the ones who more or less scared the day lights out of you. After about an hour or so of going through this procedure, they finished up. Each boy who had finished it, he was told to be very quiet and he was put inside one of the cottages down there. When the last one completed there, they all came out and they had a celebration

of having gone through this procedure. It was sort of a bonding in the troop for all the boys that belonged. I guess it still goes on. Probably a lot less intense. Today, they would call it child abuse. But we remember all these things now. At Camp Kiro, I remember being

down there one year and we were brought out at dawn. Then before breakfast, we came out and we were required to line up on the bluff and roll call was taken just like it was in the military.
Then when we got through with that, you had to go into the river and take dip in the cool water. Of course, we're talking now about July.
So, go out early in the morning there and take a dip and then come back in and dress and then came and get breakfast. They fed us very well. The price for this for a week was five dollars. That was a tremendous amount of money. Five dollars a week. That was for a full week of being taken care of and fed three big meals a day and so forth.
I passed one merit badge down there one year. What we had to do was walk all the way from Camp Kiro over to the railroad track on the opposite side of the highway 70, which went down to Morehead, then walk the railroad track, at that time there were few or no trains moving, and walk all the way to James City and return. My father found out about this and he thought that was too much for twelve year olds, but I did it anyway. I can't remember who was with me that particular day, but we did our thing and we walked to James City and back.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, let me ask a question about Mr. Potter.

Mr. Latham: Okay.

Dr. Patterson: I remember Mr. Potter and I remember Troop 13. As I recall, one of Mr. Potter's children met a terrible accidental death. Do you recall that?

Mr. Latham: I do not recall it.

Dr. Patterson: Well, as I recall, he was playing with an ice

pick in bed, jumping up and down, and I think he fell on the ice pick and it penetrated his heart.

Mr. Latham: Mr. Potter was a great teacher and he was very good with young men. What we learned later, we learned to map. He has his office downtown in the Dunn building on the corner of Pollock and Craven up on the, I believe about the third floor, pretty close to the top of the building, sort of on the southeast side so he could look out and see the river. But we would go out and learn to take measurements of an area. In my case, I mapped out Sunnyside, which was right out past the Riverside area. We took the measurements and we went back up where he had the drafting table. He would put you on a drafting table and get you started. Your job to pass the merit badge was to plot out on map where you had been and get it within his satisfaction. Many hours did the boys spend up there in his office learning how to do these things and passing these things out. He would give you his lectures on life and so forth. So, he's a good one. I would look out over the river and want to get back out on the river. During this period, I also, I'd say by the time I was twelve, I was out on the river with my father quite a bit learning to fish and fly fish and so forth up the creeks, either the Trent or up the Neuse. Then he bought, I guess it was in 1936, he had Barbour Boat Works build a Comet sailboat, a sixteen foot sailboat, which was a first of its kind in the area. It was one that he wanted and he had it built out of juniper boards, this is sort of a white cedar, one inch planks, and then it had oak beams in it. It had Egyptian cotton sails. Beautiful

sails. That's where he taught me to sail. My father taught me to sail, and his father had taught him to sail, and his father had taught him to sail. So we went back a long ways on sailing the rivers of eastern North Carolina. I was all ready sailing by the time I was eleven or twelve. I came up with the Boy Scouts and did all this camping type things. Not only did I camp with the Boy Scouts as an organization, but by then we were deciding as groups we would take off and leave from New Bern and go to various wild and woolly places like Duck Creek, which is across the river. At that time, there was absolutely nothing there but woods and marshes and things of this nature. With the organized camping, we used to go out to Island Creek which is up Trent River about, it's now very close out where River Bend is and that general area up the creek and up the river there, but it's on the opposite side, on the southern side of the Trent River. We used to go out there. I can remember Bardie going out there too. We were the "Little Russians" and we would make our campsite in the area. We weren't allowed to cut any trees or anything like that, but we had to go in and learn the names of all the trees that were in there. I still can call the names of most of them when I see them just from that experience. We would usually spend a weekend on a campsite like that. We would start late Friday afternoon or we'd get out of school and we would meet. We would have already prepared for this. At a central point we would bring our gear and Mr. Potter's committee would have seen to it that there were trucks and transportation for us to go. We'd get in the back of these trucks and that was always an exciting time. We'd ride

right across the old Trent River bridge which came down George Street where the Palace is now, and across. As you went across, then you actually made a little turn just before you got to the drawbridge. The only bridge I know of in eastern Carolina that's similar to that is the one at Harker's Island now.

Dr. Patterson: Was this much of a curve?

Mr. Latham: Not much. It was just actually sort of a turn. You went out and it turned slightly to the left. Then you went across the bridge and on the left was Mack Lupton's canning plant, which later, we ended up working our summers over there. This is going beyond the Boy Scout period. We went on out to Island Creek out the back roads, which would be more like Madam Moore's Lane now, that direction, and across Brice's Creek and on out. That was quite an exciting time. We'd stay out there the Friday night and the Saturday might and come back Sunday, and we would have had all the camping out that we needed for a while. Then if the troop wasn't camping out during the summer periods, then we would make up our own trips. Grey Whitford and I and another boy took my sailboat, that little sixteen foot sailboat, and we packed it with enough gear for a week's trip; tents and all the groceries that anybody would ever need. We left from down near the cutter Pamlico late in the afternoon.

Dr. Patterson: This was on East Front Street.

Mr. Latham: This was on East Front Street and the bridge was at the foot of Johnson Street at that time. The Pamlico was basically at the foot of Broad Street and slightly to the right. That's where

I kept my sailboat, right against the bulkhead, next to the Pamlico, sort of vertical to East Front Street. Then we left, came out, the Coast Guard, its usual pattern was to always watch us like hawks to make sure that we didn't get lost or capsize or what have you. We left the dock and it was light wind and we sailed on by them. We started sort of crossing the river but going down river at the same time, sort of at an angle. We really didn't know exactly where we were going. We were just going. We'd planned to go way down the river. We happened to look behind us in the northwest and there was this tremendous thunderhead just roaring down on us out there. We were now probably a mile and a half from the cutter when we saw this. All of a sudden the storm struck New Bern and then obliterated our view of town. So we immediately pointed ourselves to the nearest creek, which was Duck Creek. We flew over there just ahead of the gust front of the thunder storm. Nobody could see us from land cause we went right on into the creek and dropped our sails immediately because the gust front was coming in. We had this little 1.2 horsepower motor called a Pal, a little Evenrude Pal, and we put that on the back of the sailboat. You literally could start it by spinning it with your hand. We started that and we motored on up the creek with the sails down. We didn't know what was happening as far as what we left behind. We had left that Coast Guard ship over there watching us figuring we were well overloaded for this little sixteen foot boat, and when the storm cleared, there was no sailboat in sight, no boys. The next thing you know, they're out looking for three boys that had disappeared. No

sign of the boat. We'll say, meanwhile, back in the creek, we were making our little camp. We had pulled way up in the creek. It was very junglely. We found a good spot and pulled the boat up more or less under the trees, so it was very difficult to see it, and we went in and we pitched camp. We proceeded to stay in there for three days. During this time, that night, we could hear this, "Hhhellooo", all these people calling out on the river. We said, "Wonder who they're calling for?" you know, and it turns out they were calling for us. They were out looking for us. The next day an old amphibian airplane came flying over. We said, oh, there's an airplane. Of course, that was a big thing in those days to see an airplane. They had come from Elizabeth City. That was the Coast Guard coming from Elizabeth City. They were still searching for us. On the third day, up the creek comes a whale boat from the cutter Pamlico with the coxswain in the bow of the boat pushing a pole down to make sure he wasn't gonna run a ground or hit anything and they were motoring up. Where were we? We were there in our little campsite. They came there and found us enjoying ourselves and they just about had a conniption. In their relief of finding us, they taught us a whole bunch of new words that we had never heard before. There was some real sailor swearing about what I would do if you were my son! We were told to get out BUTTS back on that boat. To break camp and get ourselves back home! So, that was the end of that for that moment. But anyway, they were glad to see us home, and we did make the paper, I believe, that period. That was one of our camping trips of note. I think that same year,

and we're talking now about 1936, that year I sailed the sailboat from New Bern down to Adams Creek and through Adams Creek on down to Beaufort. With my daddy I sailed from Beaufort down by Harker's Island over to Cape Lookout. That was quite an experience there. We always spent our summers, usually August, daddy would take a month off and we would go over and spend it at a cottage over on Cape Lookout. That's where I learned to sail in salt water.

Dr. Patterson: You also told me that when you lived out in Riverside as a young boy, you got involved in Dr. Hand's group and you used to sail down to those meetings.

Mr. Latham: Well, actually, this was the same sailboat, and by this time I was, shall we say, getting to expand my territory. I was coming downtown. Bardie and I both came down this way and we would meet over here with Nat Gooding. This would be around the corner from here on Middle Street, just down from Johnson. His home was right about where the Catholic school is now. In fact, there were two homes there that were purchased and torn down so they could build a school.

Dr. Patterson: That's the former school they're moving now.

Mr. Latham: Yes, right, the school has moved. They just come in now and have a party now and then over there or play basketball. I never knew Billy during that period.

Dr. Patterson: Billy Hand.

Mr. Latham: Billy Hand. He was a little bit older than I. He was closer to my sister's age, who is my sister Mary Alice. Before World War II, there was quite a separation by age groups. You usually

stayed pretty close to those who were within a year of your age. After the war, that totally changed. But before the war, you just came up more or less with your school age group. I remember Roddy Guion down there who died of polio. We were called down at Camp Kiro one summer and were told of his death from polio, and then we all had a moment of silence there, down there on the banks of the Neuse. I'm trying to think of those I knew down here. Nat Gooding and Bardie, Bardie's grandmother was Mrs. Foy, Mrs. Claude Foy lived there, and that was how we came to know him and to play in the neighborhood. Johnny Green was down here on the corner of Middle and Johnson at that time, and the Blades boys were also there, Jack and Bill. Bill, again, was my sister's age. I knew him through my sister knowing him. There were Jack and Bobby. They were smaller. Jack was about a year younger than I, maybe two years younger, closer to my younger sister's age. I knew others down here. I didn't have an awful lot of contact here for a while. I'm trying to stay back in the before World War II now.

Dr. Patterson: Now, at this time that you're speaking of, had you finished school in Riverside and moved downtown to school?

Mr. Latham: At the sixth grade, we finished in Riverside, and at seventh grade we went down to what I call the Bell building on the high school campus on Hancock Street.

Dr. Patterson: On the school green.

Mr. Latham: On the school green, right. I was in the seventh grade, and at that time the seventh grade was on the second floor and the eighth grade was on the first floor. I'll go right into that.

I had Mrs. Willis. Mrs. Margaret Willis taught Science to me. Then we had Mrs. Winslow. She taught Math I believe. Then Miss Anderson, Louise Anderson, was my English teacher. Mary Moore was Geography and Music appreciation and things of that nature.

Dr. Patterson: She was also a librarian, wasn't she?

Mr. Latham: I believe she was. She was a wonderful person. Of course, Margaret Willis is just fantastic. She's still with us and lives right down Craven Street here now. Later, finishing the seventh grade and went downstairs and was in Coach Frank Alston's homeroom. He was quite an individual. He was our coach. I went out for basketball. I was a little light for going out for football, but I went out for basketball and he was the coach out there at that time. He taught Civics, so I learned all about the government in his class. The bane of my existence Latin.

Dr. Patterson: Who taught that?

Mr. Latham: Latin, that was Mr. Harold Whitehurst. First though, I had Mr. Harold Whitehurst and I had Mrs. Stingley. That's the name that comes to mind. I learned a little more under her than I did under Harold. Harold, he was quite a character. Today, he would have been very acceptable, but what he did at night, he was one of the original joggers. He loved to try to increase his physical prowess by running and jogging. Of course, during the day, he was very, very proper, and he just wanted to get away from this proper attitude that he had to show to the students. He wouldn't even stop if he was jogging along. He wouldn't even speak to you on the street. Because he was enjoying

his thing as it were and getting away from the pressures of teaching. We always thought he was a hard task master as far as Latin was concerned. And we always figured that he favored the girls, and he always passed the girls. None of the girls flunked, but I guarantee you that he'd flunk the boys, and I was one of those he flunked. That would take us up at that time up to about 1939. I will add a little note here-I didn't get to go to the 1939 World's Fair because I flunked my Latin and I had to take summer school. So I spent a period learning Latin from two different teachers that summer. That was second year Latin at that time. I was also taking French under Mrs. Howard Mims. I had taken French that year too. So, I had Latin and French the same year. Then I had Miss Stingley. What I would do with Miss Stingley, I would have to be there at a certain hour in the morning. She lived down on East Front Street about the second house from the Shrine parking lot there now. Claypoole was another name for that house. But, I would go there and I would go out early in the morning on the sailboat and I would bring it back in. Now, I'm home alone, as they say today. I'm home alone and the family has gone off to New York, and I have a cousin who has come over from Bellhaven to stay with me. So, we were having quite a time. So, I went down and I'd go out in the boat and I'd come back in and I'd run over just in time to make my appointment for Latin.

Dr. Patterson: You went down in your boat to East Front Street.

Mr. Latham: Well, that's where my boat was really kept, was down East Front Street near the Pamlico. Then I would go back and take

my medicine, as it were with Latin, and soon as I'd get through with that, I was back on the river again. (laughter)

Dr. Patterson: When you went to school downtown on the school green, how did you get from your home to the school?

Mr. Latham: I used to walk. I'd walk down from Riverside. I'd come down National Avenue to George, and sometimes I would go behind the cemetery and sometimes I'd go in front of the cemetery at that time. I had a pair of skates, numerous pairs of skates, I wore out. I'd wear the wheels out on the sidewalks. But we actually went home for lunch. We had about an hour. We couldn't wait to get out. We'd go zipp'n back to Riverside and lunch would be all ready prepared for us when we got there. We'd go and we'd eat and then we'd have to hurry up and go back to school. Sometimes my father would be there at the same time and then he might give us a lift back. But 99 times out of a 100, we were either walking, skating, and later, on a bicycle, and we'd make our trip over there. One of the things I remember on using skates, the fire of 1922 has caused the sidewalks to buckle from heat on George Street to, I guess, just after you cross the railroad tracks. In fact, it's even to this day, you'll find some of those sidewalks are buckled slightly. So when you were skating, you had to be very careful cause you might go skoot'n off into the air and down the other side of the concrete and you may do a little tumble. But going in front of the cemetery, it was worse on the west side of the street than it was on the east side right next to the wall, but it still was buckled. It had been very hot all through there.

They finally took, during the thirties, they took old concrete and laid it in place to make a sidewalk behind the cemetery. That one is quite a feat to skate on that going down there. I used to do that too. During this period, I guess when I was 12, 13, 14, along in there, I also took a Sun Journal route downtown here. I didn't have too many, I don't guess I had more than twenty-five customers at that time, I cannot recall, but I know right where I was. It was in the New Street and that area. I may have taken your newspaper at that time. I think it was thirteen cents a week. The newspaper got seven cents and the newscarrier got six, and the boys had to collect it. I went on with that because I had a bicycle by then and I had to earn it. It cost eighteen dollars. My daddy paid nine and I paid nine. I was trying to think of the name of the guy in charge of all of the boys that were delivery boys at Sun Journal. Hubert Jones was in the back with the presses, and we used to go back and watch him run the presses. Until I had seen him yesterday at his interview, I couldn't recall him at all. Soon as I saw him, a lot of memories came back. Jake seems to be the name I'm trying to remember. But he was in charge of the boys there and made sure that we were there on time to take the papers and get them out. If you were late, you got laced down for having been fifteen minutes late from when the press run had come off. One little aside, right next door to the Sun Journal was a little restaurant called "Mike's." This was on Pollock Street.

Dr. Patterson: Mike who?

Mr. Latham: I'm trying to think.

Dr. Patterson: Mike Shapou? Mike Jowdy?

Mr. Latham: No, it wasn't Jowdy. It could have been Shapou. But it was "Mike's" place there. I have to check that out. He was Assyrian, I believe, there. He had the best hamburger. We thought it was real expensive - it was a nickel. You'd get a hamburger, and of course if you made six cents on a person, that one hamburger was close to a week's work taking paper for one person. But then the next thing he had, something I've never seen before or since, he would strip bananas, put them on a stick like a popsicle, stick them down in the freezer, and freeze these things. He had Hershey's chocolate syrup, which after they had frozen on a stick, he would take 'em and dip 'em in this gallon of Hershey's chocolate, and then the chocolate would congeal on the banana. He would sell these for a nickel each. So, we used to enjoy that. It was a chocolate covered banana.

Dr. Patterson: You were still in high school during this time, is that right?

Mr. Latham: Oh yes. In fact, I was just downtown in this area.

Dr. Patterson: What about the last years of high school? Who were some of your teachers then?

Mr. Latham: Let's see here. On French, I had Mrs. Mims, and we always thought she was a beautiful blue-eyed blonde. She was a beautiful woman there and she was very nice too. We enjoyed her and learned a lot of French. She kept you on the subject. Then we had Barbara Youngner who became later Mrs. Barbara Brock. She had a daughter here too a few years back. Anyway, she taught me Algebra,

math, there, Algebra I. Our favorite trick with her, she would have been much happier in Science. She loved science and biology and so forth, and so we would gradually steer her around and ask questions. While we were getting our math, we would ask a question about some of the situations. At that particular time we were trying to get sewage disposal plants. They didn't have one here. All the sewage was dumped right into the Neuse River, and so at certain times it would be rather unsanitary down on the river front. So we'd get on that subject and she would come up with all kinds of ideas of things we ought to be telling our parents to get a proper sewage disposal plant, and all of the different diseases. At that time polio was very prevalent. It took years and years and years though before that ever changed. That was Miss Youngner. I had another Chemistry teacher. He was drafted while we were in class. He didn't even finish the school year. I'm trying to think what his name was.

Dr. Patterson: Fred, you graduated from New Bern High School.

Mr. Latham: That's true. I graduated there in, I guess it was May of 1941.

Dr. Patterson: What happened to you after that?

Mr. Latham: Well, immediately after graduation it was fun and games again. By that time, I was downtown and knowing a lot of folks down this way, and we would end up with the boat. I was over at Crabby's, which was boys club-type down at the confluence of the Neuse and the Trent River, right about where the Trent River bridge is at the present time. It would probably be just about where our dock and little covered

area was. We had a diving platform and things of this nature, and I dived off of that many times. That was the summer of 1941.

Dr. Patterson: What was Crabby like?

Mr. Latham: He sort of stayed out of the way of us.

Dr. Patterson: Was he small man?

Mr. Latham: He was a fairly small person there as I remember. I vaguely remember, that he had a little machine shop near right there, and daddy used to go down with him and have him manufacture parts. Daddy liked to make boat models and airplane models. He made one and he had Mr. Crabby manufactured a little three blade propeller for him. I think he actually made a mold and cast it. Then daddy got a little engine and put it in that little boat and I can remember playing with that one out on around the river shores and so forth. It had a little gasoline engine like you would put in a model airplane, which later I got into too. But Crabby, he was; now that we've tied the two thoughts together there, memories together, he was a very talented person back there, and he was also very good with the boys. He kept a lot of us out of trouble, I expect. Daddy would come down while we were down there. Every afternoon he would come down and go swimming, and he would swim across the Trent River and return. He'd do that everyday. He did it everyday of the year. In other words, summer, winter, fall, spring, right on, he would swim that river. I guess there were a few times he couldn't do it cause it froze over. But he did love to go down there. That particular summer when I graduated, we were down there. I believe it was probably about August. Suddenly,

aircraft appeared overhead, large aircraft and lots of them, and more than we'd ever seen before in our lives, in formation, and came over and they circled the town and they circled the area. They seemed to go over towards James City and it looked liked they landed over there. I'd say within about two hours later, Marines appeared in their summer khakis with their pith helmets. They had tropical pith helmets on. They were downtown walking around and we saw them, and that was a thrill! Here come the Marines. That was the first time that I had remembered ever seeing the Marines. That put a seed in my mind. Within five months, I'd joined the Marines. I left at the end of that summer. I entered North Carolina State in chemical engineering.

Dr. Patterson: This is '41?

Mr. Latham: It's 1941 and I entered it. So there I was. I entered Reserves Officer Training Corps there, ROTC, and I went through that. I was taking all the basic engineering courses. When it came up Pearl Harbor time, it was Sunday morning in the dormitories and suddenly we heard the announcement that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Right away I told another New Bernian up there, who is Nathanial Macon, he was over in the next dormitory, and I went over there and I said, "I'm gonna join the Marines." He says, "I bet you $5 you don't!" I said, "I'll bet you $5 I do!" This was on Pearl Harbor, the 7th of December. So, the next week was examination time. Well, I took my ROTC exam. I cut everything else. I stayed up there just long enough to appear to finish my exams. Then I came home for Christmas and I said, "I want to join the Marines." "You don't want to join the Marines."

"I want to join the Marines." "No you don't." Anyway, this went back and forth all the way through the holidays. Then, I guess it must have been about the 4th or 5th day of January. The mail came in at our house then about nine o'clock in the morning. My father came down and read his mail, and here was my grade schedule for the preceding quarter. He opened it up. I'm still not downstairs. Now, this is nine o'clock in the morning and he's down for breakfast. "Frederick! Get yourself downstairs! You want to join the Marines?! I'll be damned if you won't!" He'd just opened it and noticed I had a B in my course on Reserve Officers Training Corps there, and I had Incomplete, Incomplete, Incomplete, Missing from Exams. I had cut my exams and got total Incomplete for my whole quarter. I'm seventeen years old now. We ate breakfast and he says, "Where is the closest Marine recruiting station?" "I think there's one in Wilmington." "Get in that car!" I mean just like I was. "Get in that car!" We had an old, I think it was a '38 President Studebaker, and here we go. We went down Highway 17 a lickety split. I was going to the Marines. We got down to Wilmington pretty quickly. We got down there, and would you believe they were gonna give me thirty days leave before I had to report. He says, "Oh No. Where is one he can get into today?!" Well, he says, "Well, you'll have to go all the way to Raleigh to get that." He says, "Fred, you get in that car!" So, here we go. Lickety split we went through Fayetteville and on up to Raleigh. It was at the federal building there, the post office building. We drove down that street, it was getting very close to five o'clock in the

evening and he knew they closed, he says, "You go up there to that place and don't you dare let them close that door while I find a place to park!" So I ran up the three sets of steps there and I said, "I want to join the Marines! I want to join the Marines!", and boy they just smiled and brought me right in. I said, "My father's coming up and he'll sign for me", cause I told them my age right away. At that point, they had thirty-five other individuals being ready to be sworn in right then. Daddy came up. They said, "Well, he's got to have a physical." "I'm a medical doctor and I'll give statement that he's all right. He's a healthy boy. Do it." So it wasn't long boy, I was railroaded into it. Says, "Well, you want to join the reserves or you want to be a regular?" "This war's gonna last at least four years. Put him down as a regular!" So I joined the regular Marines, the USMC, not the USMCR. My color perception was doing like this, like a deck of cards with the Ishi Hahri chart. "Cause if they'd pushed me, if they'd had much time, I would have never gotten in the Marines, but such as it was, I got in. I am partially green colorblind! Daddy says, "Good luck son", and he shook my hand and went down the stairs and within thirty minutes after I had been in that recruiting station, I was number 36 on the group standing up there taking the oath, and daddy was gone away back to New Bern to get in trouble with my mama who was expecting us home for supper. He stopped in Kinston and gave her a call and said he was kind of scared to come in and face her right then, so he gave her a little time to quiet down. I heard about all this later. That night I went out and spent my last night out in my

room at the college and I went out and collected my five dollars from Nat Macon. Then the next morning, we down to the recruiting station and immediately went in a nearby restaurant and they fed us breakfast. The first breakfast a guy got on the government was a piece of toast and a cold fried egg on top of it, and that was breakfast. Now I get on the bus and away to Paris Island we went, Beaufort, South Carolina, known to Paris Island. From there, I went through the typical boot camp for Marines. Of course, my Troop 13 training had set me right for that. So I did pretty well in boot camp. When we finished the training at boot camp at Paris Island, I was transferred from there up to Indian Head, Maryland in the powder factory and I stayed up there for about six months walking around where they made the cannon powder. That was pretty close to Washington, D.C., Indian Head, Maryland. Up through that period, my sister was in Washington at that time, so occasionally on weekend, I'd go up to see her. After about six months I got transferred over to Dahlgren Naval Proving grounds right on the Potomac River and stayed for about eighteen months. Then late 1943, I was transferred down to Camp LeJeune, Tent City, put into what they call a replacement battalion and very shortly transferred overseas to join one of the Marine divisions. I went down and went through all this combat training down there. I fired a machine gun for the first time and things of that nature. Then just before Christmas, we got word that the scuttle butt as they called it, was that we were going to be shipped out before Christmas.

Dr. Patterson: 1943?

Mr. Latham: 1943. And a large number of the troops down there went "over the hill" to be home for Christmas.

Dr. Patterson: Where is down here? You were where?

Mr. Latham: I was at Camp LeJeune. It was Tent City side. They put you on the far side of the river. A bunch of them went over the hill, as it were, for Christmas. They said they wouldn't mind going, but they were gonna go home for Christmas. I was close by, so I had been up here. At the time we were suppose to be leaving, they said, well, you might as well go ahead, and they gave me a weekend pass and I came up here for Christmas in 1943. Snowing! There was five, six inches of snow. One of the few white Christmases I can remember. I hitched hike from up at Tent City. I got just outside of Jacksonville and there I was stuck. This old truck came by there, and guess who was in it? A New Bernian named Don Basnight. Don picked me up and said, "Frederick", as he still calls me that when he's around, said, "Frederick, I didn't recognize you. I normally don't pick up Marines, but I decided anybody standing out there on five inches of ice and snow, I would give them a chance." Anyway, I got in and he carried me back to New Bern. So I got home. After Christmas I went back down there, then all these "over the hill" guys started coming back. I had been put on as a MP then to guard all the troops that had gone "over the hill." They locked them all up in a stockade. Here's all the whole group I'm going over with that are in the stockade because they'd gone absent without leave. So now, they've pulled up a troop train on the base and loaded us all aboard; and now, we who hadn't

gone "over the hill," of course we were closer home, had to guard these guys from the stockade. Under arms, we had to go aboard. We had to carry their weapons. Each one of us was doubling up with weapons that those guys were gonna have. So we had to carry those weapons aboard. Then that train, someway it went through here, through New Bern, at night and it was snowing and dark. Couldn't see anything, but I knew we were passing through. Clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack. About as fast as the trains go down through here now at five miles an hours. Then we went across the bridge over the Neuse here and on up to Norfolk. We boarded the USS Extavia at Norfolk. All those Marines, as we went aboard, we gave them their guns back as they'd board the ship. (laughter) And that was it. We went on from there on down. The next day we left. In fact, it was that night we left. It was a stormy night north of Hatteras and everybody got seasick down there. I stayed up on deck aboard the ship, kept my nose in the wind, cause it was a smelly time down below decks. After that was over, that evening was over, we got down south about, maybe several hundred miles down, we got into the Tropical Seas and came on down. We went through passed Haiti and end of Cuba by Guantanamo and took a turn down through the Caribbean. We were sailing without escort. That's the ships. We went down to Panama. Went into Panama. It took us three days to go through the canal because we had so many ships going through there. We had to wait our time and the gate to unlock. The officers were allowed ashore. We weren't. All the enlisted personnel weren't allowed to go ashore. They did bring fresh fruit

and things aboard for us. We finally got through there and then went on to the west side. They sailed fairly close to the shoreline for a while and went down passed Ecuador and then off of Peru. We'd gotten down passed the equator before we turned out. I guess we were probably a couple hundred miles off of Peru down below the equator. They decided it was time for us to become shellbacks for going across the equator. So, that was an interesting deal too. Another one there. But we went on from there and went to New Caledonia. About four days out of New Caledonia, we hit a typhoon and the ship was just, as they say, shake, rattle, and roll! We rolled, cause we had well over a thousand troops on board this old victory type ship. It was personnel and it was a cargo carrier. We were light as far as cargo was concern, so that thing rolled. It rolled so much that we lost most of the life rafts. Those heavy life rafts would crash off, went off and messed up a lot of the topside. You were not allowed above decks. So again, the stomachs of all the Marines seemed queazy again and that was another smelly time. So then, the Captain decided to make a turn and go with the sea. We didn't get the word below deck. They were feeding us and we were standing up at these counters. Basically, they were lay down counters that folded out of the way when we were not being fed. You would have these metal trays and all this food, and when he turned, the thing went over about forty-five degrees. I grabbed a post that was right near there. I grabbed it and hung on, and here goes all the food sliding downhill going crashing against one side and again. This is baked beans type of things. Now, I'm still handing on, and

here come all kind of people sliding passed me crashing against the other side. Then it rolled back the other way and here it comes back the other way, and I'm hanging on still. There were some few broken arms in that go round. But once we got around and got stern to the seas, it seemed to quiet down quite a bit for us. The Australian navy found us out there about the third day and escorted us into New Caledonia in Numea. There was a camp there waiting for us and they got us off of the ship. We went into Numea through these mountains, sort of passes, I guess it was like the fjords.

I guess it would have been like in Norway and that area. Ships that had been sunk by the Japanese Air Force through there, they were all up in those areas. We went in and disembarked and we stayed there for probably about a month. Then we were put on another ship and we were sent up to Guadalcanal and I joined the 3rd Marine Division up there.

Dr. Patterson: The campaign had been over by that time, the Guadalcanal.

Mr. Latham: Yes. Right. It was over there. I had a first cousin who was with the Army Air Corps then and he was over at Henderson Field. We'd written letters and he recognized my return address was very close. He was within about five miles of me. The next thing I know I was over in the Palmolive Peak palm groves, that's where we were camped, and I had a call from the office, "There's a Captain wants to see you." "What does a Captain want to see me for?" That's bad news for a Private. So I go up there and it's my cousin Van Latham,

my first cousin. He had driven over in a jeep. I drove around. I got permission to go over to his place and see his aircraft and his B24's and so forth. He was going up to Green Island later and doing bombing runs up there.

Dr. Patterson: Where did you go from Guadalcanal?

Mr. Latham: I went up through the Carolinas. When we left Guadalcanal, it was really headed towards Saipan, and Guam. That was what was in the works. But we stopped at a place, like, Tarawa and Bikini, and all the Marshall Islands up in there. And Einewetok, I was in Einewetok in that big atoll there. The major fleet that went up to, and later for the Marianna "Turkey Shoot" and things like that, was all together in that big, tremendous atoll. There were so many ships, you could not count them. I mean within vision, any direction you looked, there were just thousands of ships. It was just an overpowering amount of naval power and ships in there and troops. We stayed there long enough that we were taken to shore just to get off the ships. We stayed about fifty days on one of those troop ships there before we went into Iwo Jima, or Guam, excuse me.

Dr. Patterson: What year was this Fred?

Mr. Latham: This would have been 1944.

Dr. Patterson: I just might comment here that in 1945, Ecky Meadows and I met each other in the Officer's Club on Einewetok.

Mr. Latham: Is that right? In '45?

Dr. Patterson: In '45, we were heading for Okinawa. Excuse me, you go ahead.

Mr. Latham: Okay. In '44, first we, the 3rd Marine Division, went up to Saipan from there. We were in reserve for the 1st Marine Division. They went into the shore. We all climbed down with our packs onto the landing craft at Saipan.

END OF INTERVIEW